



# RATS AS PETS

Domestic rats make excellent pets and are among the easiest small animals to handle. A well-socialized rat is a good pet for children and adults. It is always best to have at least two rats as they are very social animals and become lonely and bored living alone.

## **CAGING**

It is important to make sure that your rat has a large enough house to move freely and get exercise. Many rats will run in wheels, but need large wheels which need to be accounted for when choosing the right cage. It is optimal for rats to have different levels so they can climb and explore. Two full size rats should have at least three square feet of floor space (either on one level or multiple levels) and enough vertical space on each level so they can stand up without having to crouch. Wire cages are preferred to aquariums so there is not a build-up of smell. A rat will also be able to climb up the wire sides as entertainment. It is best to avoid cages with wire floors as rats feet can get trapped or become sore on wire. You can, however, put cardboard or plastic on top of wire floors to make them suitable for your rats. For most rats, daily spot cleaning and a weekly deep clean of the cage will keep their home sufficiently sanitary.

## **BEDDING**

It is best to avoid wood shavings as they often times have aromatic oils and are dusty. If you do use shavings, use aspen and avoid cedar or pine. Newspaper-based or corn cob bedding are safe choices and are

typically very absorbent. Shredded paper can also be used, but will need to be changed more frequently as it does not absorb well.

## **DIET**

There are many different foods that rats can eat. The staple food for your rat, however, should be a good quality rat food. It is optimal for your rat to get some extra variety through grain mixes, fresh vegetables, and eggs, but make sure that you do not give them too much. A rat with too much to choose from will end up eating only his or her favorite foods and may end up lacking needed nutrition. Dry pasta, eggs, berries, and whole grain are typical favorites for rat snacks.

## **SOCIALIZATION**

Rats are wonderful, interactive pets when they are handled often. They are very social animals and almost always do much better in pairs or groups. Do not pick your pet rat up by the tail—instead scoop your pet up from the belly or allow your rat to climb on to you. A well-socialized rat will likely enjoy riding on your shoulder and snuggling up with you. You can encourage your rat to come to you with treats, but do not feed treats through cage bars as it can cause problematic nipping and grabbing behaviors. Rats should be handled every day and should be given toys such as wheels and balls to entertain them. Rats are very smart animals and love to figure out games and puzzles.

If you have questions about your pet rat, please call Furry Friends at 515-222-0009 or e-mail [behavior@furryfriendsrefuge.org](mailto:behavior@furryfriendsrefuge.org).